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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001774

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: ULTRA-NATIONALIST MHP SENSING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

REF: A. ANKARA 001342

[B](#). ANKARA 001730

Classified By: Deputy POLCOUNS Charles O. Blaha; E.O. 12958, reasons 1.  
4 (b,d)

[1](#). (C) Summary. Although leaders of Turkey,s ultranationalist, right-wing National Action Party (MHP) claim that their party is a modern, democratic, secular, patriotic, and non-racist, the party has a neofascist ideology, a history of political violence, and a rigid hierarchical structure. MHP has been connected to recent anti-Christian activity in Turkey, and its publications continue to be rabidly anti-American. MHP leaders believe that the U.S. is punishing Turkey for governing AKP's failure to pass the 1 March 2003 resolution authorizing the deployment of the U.S. forces into Iraq via Turkey. Oddly, MHP leadership has not yet been able to capitalize on AKP's policy drift and the rise in Turkish nationalism. End Summary.

MHP Stays True to Neofascist, Violent History

[2](#). (C) In conversations with POLOFFs, MHP leaders claimed that their party is a modern, democratic, secular, patriotic, and non-racist party. MHP, however, is a party with a neofascist ideology, a history of political violence, and a rigid hierarchical structure. Members of MHP have been connected to recent violence against Protestant churches in Tarsus and Gaziantep (Ref A) and harassment of the Ecumenical Patriarchy in Istanbul. MHP publications, moreover, continue to print rabidly anti-American articles.

Attitudes Toward the U.S.

[3](#). (C) MHP officials have been unfailingly polite and courteous in recent meetings with POLOFFs, a stark contrast with the stiff and distant pose many MHPers displayed toward U.S. Embassy officials in the past. However, although POLOFFs have had multiple meeting with national MHP leaders and regional MHP mayors, efforts to contact regional MHP organization leaders have been rejected on two occasions. (Regional party officials from main opposition, left-of-center Republican People's Party (CHP) have also refused to hold meetings with U.S. Embassy officials on a few occasions.)

[4](#). (C) When they have met with us, MHP leaders have repeatedly stressed the importance of US-Turkish relations. MHP VP Metin Cobanoglu, for example, stressed that the US and Turkey have common national interests in the region. MHP VP Faruk Bal highlighted Turkey's geostrategic importance to the U.S. and Turkey's important role as a transit country for Central Asian oil and natural gas. MHP leaders, however, are quick to remind POLOFFs of Turkey's concerns regarding the territorial integrity of Iraq, the status of Kirkuk, the plight of the Iraqi Turkomen, and the threat posed to Turkey by the PKK/Kongra Gel terrorist organization.

[5](#). (C) MHP VP for Propaganda Metin Sandir and other MHPers have blamed the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) for the current downturn in US-Turkish relations and the rise in anti-Americanism. MHP politicians, organizations, and media outlets from across the political spectrum have contributed to the current environment. However, several MHP leaders, including Bal, Cobanoglu, and former MHP MP and party ideologue Riza Muftuoglu, have stated that Turkey should have passed the 1 March resolution authorizing the deployment of U.S. forces into Iraq via Turkey. They blame AKP for making a huge mistake, compromising Turkey's national interests, undermining the historic U.S.-Turkish friendship, and encouraging anti-Americanism in Turkey. One MHP leader noted that MHP had vocally opposed the U.S.-led intervention in Iraq. The others have all fudged the issue or claimed that MHP would have supported the U.S. if it had been in power.

[6](#). (C) Like many others in Turkey, MHP leaders universally share the belief that the USG was behind the rise of PM Erdogan and the AKP. MHP leaders believe that the U.S. is punishing Turkey for governing AKP's failure to pass the 1 March 2003 resolution authorizing the deployment of the U.S.

forces into Iraq via Turkey. Bal, for example, told POLOFF that the US should not punish the Turkish military for the errors of the governing party.

17. (C) Ulku Ocaklari (Idealist Hearths), a youth group with connections to MHP, has been actively stoking anti-Americanism under the banner of anti-imperialism. Alisan Satilmis, the former leader of Ulku Ocaklari, was recently forced by MHP leader Bahceli to resign. The reasons behind Satilmis's removal are unclear, but we suspect it had more to do with intraparty politics than U.S. Embassy activities. However, MHP leaders have pointedly sought to frame this issue in the press as MHP clamping down on anti-Americanism.

#### Erdogan Cannot Afford to Take MHP Lightly

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18. (C) The ruling AKP government cannot afford to take MHP criticism lightly: a group of AK MPs came from the MHP. Our contacts confirm that the AKP government's EU-inspired "concessions" to ethnic Kurds and on Cyprus have eroded Erdogan's support within the AKP Parliamentary Group. EU Skeptics, if Not Downright Hostile

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19. (C) MHP leaders are very skeptical about, and often outright hostile to, the Turkey-EU relationship, despite party leader Devlet Bahceli's official support for Turkey's EU membership goal during the Ecevit government (1999-2002). Muftuoglu claimed that MHP members oppose Turkey's EU membership bid. MHP VP Vural Oktay and Cobanoglu both claimed that the EU was applying an unfair double standard against Turkey. Cobanoglu, moreover, claimed that the EU was using the issue of Turkish ethnic minorities as a wedge to divide Turkey.

#### Nationalist MHP Has Not Yet Capitalized on Rising Nationalism

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10. (C) Several Turkish newspaper columnists have written columns suggesting that MHP is on the rise in Turkey, but oddly, despite resurgent nationalism in Turkey, this is not yet reflected in parliamentary resignations or public opinion polls. We have seen a small stream of MHP-oriented MPs resign from AKP; but, so far, none of the resigning MPs has joined MHP. An ANAR poll published in January, moreover, still had MHP well below the 10 percent electoral threshold. A MetroPOLL conducted in February had similar results.

11. (U) Although nationalistic sentiments are strong within the Turkish body politic, this has only rarely been translated into electoral strength for MHP. In the November 2002 elections, for example, MHP received only 8.3 percent of the vote. In fact, MHP has received less than 10 percent of the vote in every national election since 1973. The sole exception to this pattern occurred in 1999 when MHP received 18 percent of the vote in the aftermath of the GOT's capture of Abdullah Occalan, the leader of the PKK terrorist organization.

12. (C) The current MHP leadership may not be up to the task of capitalizing on AKP's policy drift and the rise in Turkish nationalism (Ref B). Muftuoglu, a dissident within the party, told us that the party's leadership is unable to take advantage of the current political environment. Oktay indicated that the party has only recently started to activate its regional and youth structures. AKP youth group president Zekif Kazdal stated that MHP's youth group is organized in less than 10 provinces and MHP-oriented groups on university campuses are very small and prone to violence.

13. (C) Comment: MHP could gain strength as tension between the EU and Turkey rises over EU demands perceived domestically as infringements on Turkish honor and sovereignty. MHP leaders are clearly aware of the press stories highlighting turmoil within governing AKP and strains in the U.S.-Turkish relationship. They sense that they can gain domestic political advantages by criticizing AKP's mishandling of U.S.-Turkish relations and its perceived failure to protect Turkish interests in Iraq. End Comment.  
EDELMAN